

## **The Legend of Hawkins** by Kamije Celeek

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**Summary:** When Princess Jane is turned to stone by the wizard Brenner, it's up to her childhood friend Mike to find a way to turn her back to normal.

## The Legend of Hawkins

*There is a legend of a time long ago.*

*In those days, a crack had appeared between two worlds—a world of darkness and a world of light. Through this crack—which was called the Gate—came beasts and monsters of all kinds. They terrorized the inhabitants of the world of light and plunged that world into chaos and fear. Nobody could stand for long against the menace and it seemed as if all would be lost forever. Then, one day, a hero suddenly appeared wielding a sword and a mysterious golden light. Using his sword and the power of the light, he beat back the darkness and sealed the gate, the remaining evil being bound by the sword into a chest that was guarded by the royal family of the land of Hawkins.*

*And for a century, the peace brought by this hero has remained. But in that time, the people of Hawkins have become forgetful and complacent in their lives. No longer do they remember the horror and terror of those days with the Gate opening. Instead, they go about their lives and treat it as nothing more than stories to tell their children before bed, to scare their children into being on their best behavior. Or as the reason for a festival that would once again bring darkness upon the land so many years later.*

*And that brings to mind the old adage: those who do not learn from history...*

*Are doomed to repeat it.*

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It was a beautiful and clear day in the kingdom of Hawkins. Within the town closest to the castle, preparations were being made for the annual Festival of Light. Everyone was busily rushing around, decorating and making sure everything was in place. The banners in place were colorful, with flowers scattered around in pots and children laughing as they ran around. Booths were set up with a variety of items for sale, posters of different festival events were pasted to the walls of businesses, and in between it all was a young woman who was walking through with a determined stride. She was quiet, unassuming, and heading straight for the gates of the town.

Once outside, she exhaled and set her gaze on her true destination—a cottage that already had smoke coming from the chimney. It was located away from everything else, but she didn't mind the walk. After all, this was the walk she'd been taking since she was a small child to visit her closest friend and his family. Outside the cottage was a little blonde girl playing in the early-morning sunshine. The girl noticed the visitor and her eyes widened with excitement.

"El! What are you doing here?" she gasped.

"I'm here because the Festival of Light is today and I was hoping your brother could go with me." El winked at the little girl. "Is he up yet?"

"Nope. He's still super-lazy. Nancy says he'll never be a knight at this rate."

"Let's go get him, shall we?"

The two went into the cottage, where Nancy was working hard on making a sword. Despite her gender and the fact that the path of a sword-smith was traditionally held by men, she was known throughout Hawkins for crafting the finest blades known to humans. She was just sliding the blade into its pommel when she noticed El.

"Oh, good morning, El. Here to see Mike?" Nancy's voice was suggestive.

"Not like *that*. I wanted to know if he'd go to the festival with me today. Is he up?"

"Not yet." Nancy turned to the staircase. "*Mike! Get your lazy ass down here!*"

"I'm coming!" came a reply.

A young man came down the stairs, his dark hair messy and curling at the ends from sleep as he rubbed his eyes. But every sign of tiredness vanished as he set eyes on El.

"E-El!" he stammered, almost falling over the bottom step. "Hi!"

"Hi to you, too."

Mike cleared his throat and tried in vain to tame his dark hair.

"So, uh, the festival's today! I thought you'd be enjoying that!"

"I plan to, but I came to ask if you would go with me."

"Yes. Yes, I will go with you."

"Wow, not an *ounce* of hesitation," snorted Nancy, smirking.

"*Shut up, Nancy!*" he hissed.

"Can I come, too?" the youngest asked, looking up at El with wide eyes.

"Of course, Holly Belle. You're welcome to join us."

Mike rushed upstairs to get ready to go while Nancy sheathed the sword she'd been working on and wrapped it up. Upon finishing, she handed it to El.

"Here. I was supposed to give this to your aunt before the ceremony, but now you can do it instead."

"What ceremony?" inquired Holly, tilting her head.

"Every year, there's a big combat competition," explained Nancy. "The winner of the competition gets a sword and their name on a plaque. And they get to touch the Sacred Blade of legend."

"Like the one from Mikey's stories?"

"They're not just stories," El warned. "They really happened and there's a lot of dark power sealed inside that chest. If something happened to the sword... we'd all be screwed."

"Okay, let's go!" Mike huffed, coming back downstairs. El and Holly walked with him out the door and towards town.

Everything was already getting started by the time they got there. El entered her name in the raffle (not that it mattered, Mike had pointed out; nobody wins anything good in those things) and they wandered

about, looking at the stalls. Holly pulled at her older brother's hand, wanting to go to every booth and try everything she could. And he couldn't say no, especially when El was just as excited to see everything. It was the byproduct of being one of Holly's primary caretakers.

"WE HAVE A WINNER!" announced the woman running the raffle. "PRINCESS JANE, FIRST PRIZE RIGHT AT THE START!"

El made her way over, Holly and Mike following her closely.

"Pick your prize, Your Highness!"

"Get the big jewel!" a man suggested.

"No, the necklace!" a girl their age argued.

"The heart-shaped stone!" added another girl.

El's eyes passed over all the items on the table and she pointed to a small shield that had the Hawkins royal crest on it—a hawk carrying a sword and a ball of light. The raffle woman blinked.

"You want *that*?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're certainly an odd princess." El picked up the shield and started walking away with Mike and Holly. Then she handed the shield to Mike.

"Here. You're gonna be a knight one day and you'll need this. Use it to protect me and Holly."

Mike blushed but took the gift anyway.

Eventually, they went to the castle, where El's mother—Queen Theresa, or Terry as close friends knew her—and her aunt Becky were waiting. Becky ushered El into the castle to prepare for the ceremony with the Sacred Blade while the queen invited Mike and Holly to watch the ceremony with the royal family. Of course they accepted and before long, the ceremony began.

"So, what's all this about?" Mike asked Becky as they waited.

"Well, you know the stories of the Gate and the darkness that came from it. Supposedly, all the evil that didn't go back behind the Gate is sealed within the chest that is bound by the Sacred Blade. Every year, the winner of the combat competition is allowed to come forward and touch the sword as a symbol of their strength."

Guards came forward, carrying the bound chest and Mike could feel the power humming from the blade, evil emanating from the chest itself, and a dark power approaching. His stomach twisted uncomfortably and he noticed El shifting in discomfort as well. That was what let him know that he wasn't just imagining it; El was far more sensitive to things like that, so if she was bothered by it, then it must have been strong.

The source of the darkness turned out to be an old man with a gaunt face and white hair, the winner of the combat competition. Mike narrowed his eyes at the man, who looked especially confident as he approached the queen.

"Brenner," began the queen. "You have proven yourself to be a brave and valiant fighter in our annual competition. As tradition dictates, you receive this fine blade and your name will be inscribed in the annals of our festival. You will also be allowed to touch the Sacred Blade."

Alarm bells began going off in Mike's head, and he saw El moving to object. But then Brenner began laughing.

"Oh, Your Majesty, thank you so much for the opportunity. But I'm afraid my prize isn't that useless sword or my name going down in history. No, my prize is in that chest and winning your little competition was the only way for me to get near it."

Immediately, the guards put up their spears in defense of the Sacred Blade and Brenner rolled his eyes. He used his powers to toss them aside and then threw a ball of dark energy at the Blade, breaking it as he unsealed the chest.

Creatures began pouring out of it, swirling in the air and getting close

to the innocents who were gathered before suddenly freezing and being scattered by some power other than Brenner's. Everyone looked to see El standing there with a narrow-eyed look of defiance and a drop of blood coming from her nose.

"Leave," she ordered Brenner coldly. To Mike's shock, Brenner just chuckled.

"Princess Jane. So the rumors of your power were true." He formed another ball of dark energy. "You'll just get in my way if I don't take care of you now."

On instinct, Mike ran straight for El, sliding between her and Brenner and holding up the shield she'd given him to protect her. Brenner scoffed in annoyance and suddenly, every part of Mike's body burned with pain as he was tossed aside just like the guards had been. Then he heard El scream briefly and then it ended just as soon as it ended. Vaguely, he registered Brenner making a comment in disgust and stating that he would find the 'Light Force', whatever that was.

Finally, he raised his head to look at El and felt his heart stop.

His childhood friend was standing there, the look of defiance still on her face. But every part of her—her delicate brown curls, her button nose, and even the drop of blood that fell from it—had been turned to stone. Mike couldn't breathe as he staggered to his feet and stumbled towards her.

"El?"

"Janey...?" whispered Terry, standing from where she'd ducked to avoid Brenner's attack. Her eyes landed on her daughter and she shrieked. "JANEY!"

"I'm sorry..." Mike whispered, trembling. "I... I couldn't..."

The words caught and died in his throat as the pain from Brenner's spell and the knowledge that he'd failed to protect El became too much. Darkness swam in his vision as he lost consciousness and collapsed.

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"...for the job."

"Terry, you *can't* be serious!"

"You didn't see him during the ceremony, Becky! He and Janey were the only ones who noticed there was something off about Brenner. If we send anybody else, they'll be easily duped. Plus, with Janey involved, he'll take it seriously. They're childhood friends, after all."

Mike groaned and rubbed his head. The dull feeling of pain that had dissipated was all over his body. For a moment, he wondered where he was—a bedroom that was not his own, in a place he didn't quite recognize—but then memories of what had happened popped into his mind.

*The ceremony. Feeling uneasy. Brenner. El...*

*El!*

She'd been turned to stone. His best friend, unreachable and frozen in a single moment of defiance. And he'd failed to protect her.

*Terry's probably planning my imprisonment. Or my execution.*

*Time to face the music.*

He got up from the bed and headed out of the room, which was oddly enough adjacent to the throne room where Becky and Terry were in a heated debate. Nancy was holding Holly, who was sniffing and rocking back and forth. And then he saw the stone version of El standing between the thrones and his heart sank. Mike went to join his sisters and Nancy placed a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"It wasn't your fault, Mike."

"I thought something was off about that guy. And I didn't say anything. And I didn't protect El. Queen Terry's going to have me banished or executed."

"She won't. Trust me."

"Michael!" called Becky. "Come here, please!"



He approached the queen and her sister.

"I'm sorry I didn't protect El!" he blurted. "Go ahead and execute me—I deserve it!"

"I'm not going to execute you," Terry assured him, smiling gently. "I have a task for you instead."

"A task?"

"The Sacred Blade is the one thing that can restore Janey back to her normal state. Unfortunately, it was broken when Brenner attacked. What I want you to do is take the blade to Mount Indy and find a man named Jim Hopper. He's the one who can restore it and tell you how to once again fill it with light."

"No offense, Your Majesty... but why me?"

"You could tell something was off about Brenner. Unlike the guards, you won't be tricked easily. And you have a personal stake in this mission—restoring your dear friend." She handed Mike the shattered Sacred Blade—wrapped in a cloth to keep them together.

"You won't go unarmed, either," Nancy stated, coming forward with the sword she'd made for Brenner. "It's dangerous to go alone. Take this."

"Thanks, Nancy." Mike swallowed nervously. He put the sword on his back and took a deep breath before approaching El's statue.

*I'll be back, El. And I'll turn you back to normal.*

*I promise.*